

God has the power to step into our world of sin and misery, bringing life, cleansing, and new beginnings. Such a Divine invasion is the purpose of all miracles in the Bible. Let us rejoice this Christmas-time that God is committed to “tabernacling among us” (John 1:14) forever – never to leave us to ourselves. This is why His Son, born at Christmas, does miracles: to prove that God and His Kingdom have indeed come into our world to change everything once and for all. No wonder Jesus is given the name called “Immanuel,” God with us!

Monday: Read Exodus 4:1-9 & 4:17

Breaking in to Rescue

The story of the Exodus contains the first period of “signs and wonders” in the Bible. It is inaugurated with three supernatural signs. By God’s bestowal of Divine power, Moses is given the power to perform these signs with his rod.

What was the purpose of these miracles? Miracles indicate the desperate state of God’s people in sin – so desperate that only miraculous intervention by God will be sufficient for their salvation. This is a unique fact about Biblical Christianity which sets it apart from other world religions. Other world religions scatter random miracles here and there but have no place for the intentional, supernatural intervention of God into human existence.

To be saved, Christianity requires those of faith to step out of what Richard Philips calls, “... the bounds of nature. Christianity differs... in that it posits a world that in its natural state is lost, that requires an in-breaking of divine power and action for salvation.” Such an “in-breaking” of God into our fallen world explains the importance of miracles in the Bible. Hence we believe that miracles are symbols of a bigger invasion!

C.S. Lewis *Miracles*

Meditate and Pray: How we should rejoice that our God is willing to “roll up His sleeves” and come right down to do whatever it takes, physically and supernaturally, to rescue His people from the bondage of sin! No wonder God’s great work of redemption is so packed with miracles! Celebrate God’s mighty, miracle-working arm with the words which Moses and the people of Israel sang after the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea:

In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. The nations will hear and tremble... terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as stone – until your people pass by, O Lord, until the people you bought pass by.
Ex. 15:13-14 & 16

Tuesday: Read 2 Kings 5:1-8 and Matthew 8:1-4

Miracles Point to the Word

Though the focus of Matthew 8 is on the healing of the leper, we must not forget that Jesus always used the miraculous as a handmaid to His teaching. During the days of Elisha also, though we have very little samples of his prophetic teaching, the miracles he wrought were simply to confirm the authority of God’s Word from his lips. Thus, everything that the prophets *did* was meant to exalt what they *said*. How much more is this true of Jesus, God’s final Word and greatest Prophet in all of Scripture.

Jesus was first of all the Word of God made flesh, coming to teach men the “truth that would set them free” – never merely a worker of wonders. So, Matthew carefully reminds us in Matt. 8:1 that our Lord has just “come down the mountain,” the place where He had taught the multitudes. For this teaching purpose Jesus came (Mark

1:38) . Oh, may we value each word of His teaching. After all, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks in song for the priority of the spoken word which our Lord Jesus observed in all His ministry, singing hymn # 141 in our Red Trinity Hymnal:

*1 God, in the Gospel of His Son,
Makes His eternal counsels known;
Where love in all its glory shines,
And truth is drawn in fairest lines.*

*2 Here sinners of a humble frame
May taste His grace, and learn His Name;
May read, in characters of blood,
The wisdom, power, and grace of God.*

*3 Here faith reveals to mortal eyes
A brighter world beyond the skies;
Here shines the light which guides our way
From earth to realms of endless day.*

*4 O grant us grace, Almighty Lord,
To read and mark Thy holy Word;
Its truths with meekness to receive,
And by Its holy precepts live.*

Wednesday: Read Matthew 7:28-8:3

Purifying Power

Having established the authority of His teaching in Matt. 7:28, Jesus confirms it by a sign of equal Divine authority in the cleansing of the leper. As the leper comes to meet Him, Jesus welcomes him and stretches out His hand to touch and heal. This is a shocking act; it violated all the Old Testament ceremonial laws, since lepers were to stay “outside the camp” and away from all social contact (Leviticus 13:46). The reason for this was that a leper defiled everything that he touched. To be a leper was a stigma and source of shame; leprosy pictured the polluting effects of sin and therefore had to be shunned. But when Christ came, who would fulfill all the ceremonial as well as moral requirements of the Law, the curse and stain of leprosy were removed! As God, Christ is able to make what is unclean clean! What cleansing power our Lord has!

Meditate and Pray: Singing about Christ’s purifying power in hymn # 253:

*There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from
Emmanuel’s veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all
their guilty stains.
Lose all their guilty stains, lose all their guilty
stains;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all
their guilty stains.*

*The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his
day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my
sins away.
Washed all my sins away, washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my
sins away.*

*Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never
lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin
no more.
Be saved, to sin no more, be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed church of God be saved, to sin
no more.*

*E’er since, by faith, I saw the stream Thy flowing
wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till
I die.
And shall be till I die, and shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme, and shall be till
I die.*

Thursday: Read Matthew 8:1-4**Authoritative Pronouncement**

Jesus ordered the cleansed leper to go to the priest in order for his healing to be examined. This was according to the Law in Leviticus 14:1-20; it was the priest who would declare the leper to be clean, and it was through the priest's offices that the cleansed man could make offering to the Lord in thankful recognition of God's healing mercy towards him. All was to be done through the priest, according to what Moses commanded.

Meditate and Pray: How thankful we should be to have a High Priest, Jesus Christ, who can authoritatively pronounce us "clean" from the polluting guilt of sin! Sing about the joy of such a removal of our guilt through the superior priestly power of Jesus, using hymn # 242:

*Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,
Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.*

*My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of Thine,
While, like a penitent, I stand,
And there confess my sin.*

*Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing His bleeding love.*

Fri/Sat/Sun: Read Matthew 8:1-4 & 2 Kings 5:13-15**Personally Convicted, Personally Unbound**

To understand the joy of the leper as Jesus sent him to the priest for confirmation of the miracle, one needs to imagine the totally hopeless physical and spiritual condition of those infected with this terrible disease. One commentator describes the physical suffering thus:

As the sickness progresses, the thickened or scaly spots on the skin become dirty sores and ulcers, due to poor blood supply. The skin, especially around the eyes and ears, begins to bunch, with deep furrows between the swellings, so that the face of the afflicted person begins to resemble that of a lion. Fingers and toes drop off or are absorbed. Eyebrows and eyelashes drop out. By this time one can see, feel and even smell that this person is a leper, for the leper emits a very unpleasant odor.... All the senses are engaged in the detection of a leper. (W. Hendriksen)

The Law required display of signs of mourning for sin. He was to leave his hair uncut, his head and upper lip covered, his clothes torn. His voice was to cry out, "unclean, unclean" (Leviticus 13:45). All this was to express sorrow for sin, for leprosy was considered to be a smiting from the hand of God. This is why lepers in the Bible were not sent to physicians, or even to the priest for healing. All that religious authorities could do was to *pronounce the healed leper cleansed!* God alone could do the healing. Men could only stand back and marvel at God's cleansing power. That is why Matthew highlights Jesus' touching and healing this leprous man – only God the Son could thus cleanse!

Compare this event in Matthew to the work of the Spirit in the pagan general Naaman. Though the Syrians in 2 Kings 5 do not have the same rigid laws about contamination through leprosy as Israel does, Naaman is

nevertheless convicted of the shameful sinfulness that leprosy symbolizes. Hence, when he is cleansed, he confesses saving faith in the Lord as the only true God (2 Kings 5:15). His gratitude springs from his conviction of personal sin which his leprosy impressed upon him.

Meditate and Pray: Let us lean in complete trust on the power of Jesus Christ the Good Physician. He alone can “take up our infirmities and carry our diseases” (Matt. 8:17)! Oh, how we need His compassionate, healing touch for our many spiritual diseases and sorrows, even as the following hymn by Henry Twells well expresses our need:

*1 At even, ere the sun was set,
The sick, O Lord, around Thee lay;
O, with how many pains they met!
O, with what joy they went away!*

*2 Once more 'tis eventide, and we,
Oppressed with various ills, draw near;
What if Thyself we cannot see?
We know that Thou art ever near.*

*3 O Savior Christ, our woes dispel;
For some are sick, and some are sad;
And some have never loved Thee well,
And some have lost the love they had.*

*4 And some are pressed with worldly care
And some are tried with sinful doubt;
And some such grievous passions tear,
That only Thou canst cast them out.*

*5 And some have found the world is vain,
Yet from the world they break not free;
And some have friends who give them pain,
Yet have not sought a friend in Thee.*

*6 And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
For none are wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.*

*7 O Savior Christ, Thou too art man;
Thou has been troubled, tempted, tried;
Thy kind but searching glance can scan
The very wounds that shame would hide.*